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ABSTRACT

Bafa Bafa is a cross-culture simulation exercise developed by R. Garry Shirts. It is designed for administrators, faculty, and students who are in situations that require an experiential understanding of another culture. After participants are given a brief orientation to the exercise, they are divided into two groups or "cultures." They are then introduced to the values, rules, expectations, and customs of their new culture. Observers are exchanged between the two cultures. After a fixed time, the observers return to their respective groups and report on what they saw. Each group tries to develop hypotheses about the most effective way to interact with the other culture. After the exercise, the participants discuss and analyze the experience and generalize it to other groups in the real world. Benefits include enhancing teaching and learning in a culturally diverse classroom, dealing with racial and ethnic conflict, and developing an understanding of the needs of different racial and ethnic groups. (This paper contains directions for creating the Bafa Bafa simulation. It also reports some learning outcomes from it, such as the negative feelings people often have for other cultures and the need for both study and experience in order to understand the nuances of culture.) (KC)

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Bafá Bafá - A Cross-Culture Simulation

By James R. Romero, Ph.D.

Bafá Bafá, a cross-culture simulation exercise developed by R. Garry Shirts, is designed for administrators, faculty and students who are in situations which require an experiential understanding of another culture. It can be used successfully in public schools, institutions of higher education, and in business and industry as a laboratory exercise, as a change of pace to stimulate interest and enthusiasm and as an introductory experience to introduce ideas, concepts and principles related to cultural diversity.

After the participants are given a brief orientation to the exercise, they are divided into two groups or "cultures". Once separated into Betans and Alphans, they are then introduced to the values, rules, expectations and customs of their new culture. Observers are exchanged between cultures as soon as they have had sufficient practice in their new culture. The observers attempt to learn as much as possible about the values, rules, and customs of the other culture without directly asking about them. After a fixed time, the observers return to their respective groups and report on what they saw. Each group tries to develop hypotheses about the most effective way to interact with the other culture, based on information provided by the observer. After the hypotheses generating discussion, the participants proceed with each person taking a turn at trying to live in and adapt to the other culture. When everyone has had a chance to visit, the exercise is ended. The participants then discuss and analyze the experience.

Through discussion this experience is then generalized to attitudes towards other groups in the real world. Probably the most unique feature of Bafá Bafá is that the interest and involvement reaches a climax in the discussion after the simulation, rather than during the simulation itself. It is during the discussion that the mysteries of each of the cultures are unraveled as the participants compare perceptions of one another's culture.

Some of the benefits of using Bafá Bafá include:

- Enhancing teaching and learning in a culturally diverse classroom environment
- Promoting and managing cultural diversity within organizations
- Managing and preventing incidents of racial and ethnic conflict
- Understanding and responding to the needs of different racial and ethnic groups

Bafá Bafá will help participants understand how stereotypes of other cultures get formed and perpetuated. In real life, such stereotypes make it difficult for people to work and learn together effectively. Unlike life, however, the simulation gives participants an opportunity to analyze and discuss how such stereotypes are formed as well as how to overcome their negative effects.

Learning Outcomes From Bafá Bafá

After playing Bafá Bafá, participants report that they learned the following:

1. The outsider must realize that what seems irrational, contradictory, or unimportant to him / her may seem rational, consistent and terribly important to the person in the other culture, company, department or occupation.

2. Judgements about other cultures by others must be regarded with a healthy dose of skepticism. In other words, one should make up one's own mind about another culture and not rely on the reports and experiences of others.

3. It's often dangerous to try to play by the other culture's rules if you don't have a basic understanding of the culture.

4. Learning the language of the other culture is probably the single most important act one can do

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to understand and work with it.

5. One is likely to seriously misinterpret other cultures, if one evaluates them solely in terms of one's own values, expectations and behavior.

6. People are rarely aware of the impact their language has on an outsider.

7. Visitors are often "invisible" to people within the culture.

8. It requires study as well as experience to understand the many subtleties of another culture.

9. Different cultures, often interpret the same event differently.

10. There is often a reluctance to interpret one's own culture to outsiders until they've "earned" the right to know.

11. Developing a close friendship with a sensitive person from the other culture who can serve as one's guide and advocate is one of the best strategies for understanding and working with the other culture.

12. The feelings people have for one's own language are often not evident until they encounter another language.

13. Stereotyping is probably inevitable in the absence of frequent contact or study.

14. People tend to put negative interpretations on differences in which the same task is done differently in the two cultures.

Instructions For Facilitating
Bafá Bafá - A Cross Culture Simulation Exercise

Group Size

The lowest limit at which the simulation can successfully be played is 6 people in each culture. The maximum number is less fixed and is determined by the number of materials in the game kit. (Approximately 20 in each culture)

Audience

Students in grades 9 - 12, adults and any persons who must work with people from diverse cultures, departments, or companies.

Time Required

Bafá Bafá can be played, depending on the size of the two groups, in 40 minutes to 1 1/2 hours. This does not include time for the discussion which can take from 30 minutes to 1 hour. It can be played in a 50 minute class period one day and then discussed the next day, although doing it this way is less effective.

Materials

1 Bafá Bafá kit (Two kits if more than 40 participants)
2 Cassette tape players
2 rooms (adjacent to each other if possible)
1 Flip chart and markers - masking tape

Facilitators

Two facilitators are required, one for each culture. It is very important for the facilitators to have read the directions and listened to their tape prior to conducting the exercise. One facilitator should be designated as time-keeper for the observers and visitors in order to keep the game moving.

Overview

Participants are briefed on the general purposes of the simulation and divided into two groups or "Cultures". They are then introduced to the values, expectations and customs of their new culture. Once all of the members understand, practice and feel comfortable with their new culture, observers are exchanged. The observers attempt to learn as much as possible about the values, norms and customs of the other culture without directly asking about them. After a fixed time, the observers return to their respective groups and report on what they saw. Each group tries to develop hypotheses about the most effective way to interact with the other culture, based on the information provided by the observer. After the hypotheses generating discussion, the participants proceed with each person taking a turn at trying to live in and adapt to the other culture. When everyone has had a chance to visit, the game is ended. The participants then discuss and analyze the experience.

Orientation

The purpose of the orientation is to briefly explain the objectives of the simulation and outline the procedures which will be followed. It is very easy to overwhelm people with instructions in the orientation. This should be avoided as the participants can become so frustrated that their ability to effectively participate in the simulation can be reduced. On the other hand, enough information should be given so that they are assured that you, as facilitator, know what you are doing, that the objectives of the simulation are worthy of their interest and time and that the broad outlines of the experience are apparent.

The following is a suggested outline for the orientation. Explain to the group that the specific purposes of the simulation will become evident as the simulation progresses, but basically the experience is intended to:

- create a situation which allows us to profitably explore the idea of culture.
- create feelings which are similar to those one will likely encounter when one travels to a different culture.
- give participants experience in observing and interacting with a different culture.

Before the game begins, write each of the italicized headings below on the chalkboard. Explain that you will provide more detailed instructions as the game develops but that the general outline of what happens is as follows.

1. ***Divide into two cultures***

   You will be divided into the Alpha Culture and Beta Culture as soon as we finish this orientation.

2. ***Learn and practice your new culture.***

In the real world, cultures develop shared meanings and ways of interacting over many centuries for many different reasons. Likewise, a person living in a culture learns the different rules and reasons for various behavior over his or her entire lifetime. In this experience, we are going to give you those rules and ask you to learn them in a very short period of time. They may seem complicated at first, but as you practice them they will appear very clear and reasonable.

3. ***Select an observer***

Each group is to select a person to travel to the other culture to observe the ways they behave with an eye towards helping future visitors. The observer should try and figure out what rules govern the behavior of the other group, by carefully observing their actions. It is not permissible for the observer to ask a member of the other culture about the rules; they are to be figured out on the basis of observation and later trail and error.

4. ***Exchange of observers***

Once the Alpha Culture and the Beta Culture are well established the observers will travel to the other culture. They will be wearing a badge with the name of their home culture on it. Each observer has approximately two minutes to learn as much as he or she can about the foreign culture. It should be remembered that they must learn from intelligent observation. Asking questions about the rules is not allowed. Observers may want to bring notepads or paper to take notes.

5. ***Report of observers***

The observers will return to their home culture and describe what they saw and any ideas they have about the values, mores and rules of the other culture. Everyone in the group should be encouraged to develop ideas about the meaning of the observers' report so that future visitors will have the benefit of the entire group's thinking.

6. ***Exchange of visitors***

Once each group has had the chance to discuss the report of their observer, then each culture continues practicing. Once each culture is re-established, visitors will be exchanged. Visitors will be given cards, chips or whatever is used in the culture to be visited. The purpose of the visit is to try to successfully interact with the other culture. The lead facilitator will indicate how many visitors will be exchanged and the length of time each group of visitors will stay in the different culture. Facilitators must collect the cards, chips, etc., before the visitors return to their home culture.

7. ***End of game***

Once everyone has had a chance to visit the other culture, the game is ended. Each culture will describe on newsprint their impressions, perceptions and feelings about the other culture prior to returning to the big group.

8. ***Discussion and analysis***

The two cultures will be brought together to discuss and analyze the experience. Two sets of discussion questions follow.

Discussion And Analysis
(If discussion time is limited)

The strength of the simulation for many people is that it allows the facilitator to surface the feelings, anxieties, misperceptions, and counter-productive attitudes of people who by choice or circumstance are required to interact with another culture or subculture. For others the advantage of the experience lies in being able to help them realize that the people with whom they are presently dealing (women, blacks, Hispanics, Indians, etc.) may belong to a different culture and be operating according to another set of rules. There are many different uses which the simulation may serve by giving careful thought to what questions and topics will be debated in the post-game discussion. However, in almost all cases the following questions should be asked before going on to the task of relating the experience to more specific objectives. These questions, if asked in the sequence outlined below, allow each group to see how they were perceived and, more importantly, misperceived by the other group. Please allow at least 30 - 45 minutes for this discussion. Prior to discussing the questions below, have each Alphan sit next to a Betan.

1. Ask the Beta members to explain the Alpha Culture. (Use newsprint prepared earlier)
2. Ask the Alpha members to explain the Beta Culture. (Use newsprint prepared earlier)
3. Ask a Beta member to explain the Beta Culture to the Alphan sitting next to them.
4. Ask an Alpha member to explain the Alpha Culture to the Betan sitting next to them.
5. Ask what cultures presently exist in their community or school.
6. How will this Bafá Bafá experience affect your perceptions of these cultures?
7. How does not being accepted into another culture affect behavior?
8. What might you do to assist people in assimilating into the community's or school's dominant culture?
9. How important is it to have a basic understanding of a culture before attempting to interact with that culture?
10. What are some strategies to overcome stereotyping members of another culture?
11. Ask participants to complete the sentence "In playing Bafá Bafá, I learned.....

Discussion And Analysis
(If discussion time is unlimited)

The strength of the simulation for many people is that it allows the facilitator to explore the feelings, anxieties, misperceptions, and counter-productive attitudes of people who by choice or circumstance are required to interact with another culture or subculture. For others the advantage of the experience lies in being able to help them realize that the people with whom they are presently dealing may belong to a difference culture and be operating according to another set of rules. There are many different uses which the simulation may serve by giving careful thought to what questions and topics will be discussed in the post-game analysis. However, in almost all cases, the questions 1 through 10 should be asked before going on to the task of relating the experience to more specific objectives. Prior to the discussion, have each Betan sit next to an Alphan.

1. Ask the Alpha members to explain the Beta Culture. (Use flipchart prepared earlier)

2. Ask the Beta members to explain the Alpha Culture. (Use flipchart prepared earlier)

3. Ask an Alpha member to explain the Alpha Culture to the Betan sitting next to them.

4. Ask a Beta member to explain the Beta Culture to the Alphan sitting next to them.

5. Ask what cultures presently exist in their community or school.

6. How will this Bafá Bafá experience affect your perceptions of these cultures?

7. Ask members of each culture in which culture they would prefer to live and why.

   If there are women who prefer the Alpha Culture, you might want to ask them <u>why</u> they prefer Alpha when the rules discriminate against women.

8. In the game, you were not allowed to tell the rules of the culture. Are there situations and conditions in the "real world" which make it difficult to ask about the rules of another culture?

   On occasion, participants have dismissed the possibility of learning from the game because of this rule. "If I could have asked about the rules, I would have been able to do O.K. in the other culture", is the way belief may be expressed. Maybe, but asking questions in the simulation, may be less like the "real world" than one would think.

   Nothing in this response is meant to indicate that one shouldn't ask questions. On the contrary, it is very important that one does. Asking questions will not only supply valuable information, it generally means that a person is interested in learning about the culture and attitude is everything. What is does suggest is that, even though the rule against asking the rules is an artificial one for many participants it creates a situation which is similar to that which one experiences when visiting another culture or subculture.

9. Is it possible to talk about another culture without using evaluative terms?

   It should be, but it is difficult. Using words which describe the ways in which the behavior of the other group is different from one's own and ways in which it is the same is one way to reduce evaluative types of comments. An interesting exercise is to review the way they describe one another with the intent of reducing the evaluative comments. The larger question, however, is whether it is meaningful or helpful to avoid evaluation.

10. Does prolonged contact with another group increase understanding and appreciation between various groups?

    Often members of the other culture speak a language or dialect the visitor doesn't understand and so it is difficult to ask or answer questions. Moreover, we are often reluctant to ask questions about ways of behaving for fear of being rude. It's hard to ask why one does something without seeming to question the validity of that behavior. Furthermore, many actions which are culturally determined are not evident to the people in the culture. Few Americans, for instance, are aware that they space themselves approximately 18 inches apart when standing in a group, or the conditions and circumstances which govern the amount of time it is appropriate for them to look another person directly in the eye.

    Also the forces governing some types of behavior are quite elaborate and difficult to communicate. In some cultures, for example, there are complex rules which dictate one's arrival time at various social functions. Rules which the people may be aware of but are not able to explain because it would be almost impossible to explain the basis for the innumerable judgments which such a decision requires. They simply arrive on time. American Field Service exchange students often find it difficult to communicate their experiences to the people back home for this reason. To explain a simple incident may require pages of background to make it meaningful for people who are unfamiliar with the culture.

The cultures presented in Bafá Bafá are designed to catch the essence of the difference between cultures without replicating a culture. Real cultures are infinitely more complex. It might be said that the Beta language, for example, is to real language as the Beta or Alpha Culture is to an existing culture. The point is that if a person were given the option of asking what rules governed the behavior of the Betans, they would figure out their culture quite easily. But questions about existing culture would not likely yield a proportionate amount of information.

The assumption of the statement seems to be that one would not feel the frustration, embarrassment and sense of strangeness which people often report feeling, if they could just get a few questions answered. But persons who have completed extensive training courses designed to prepare them to live in a foreign culture, often report having similar types of feelings when they arrive at their destination. Knowing the language and customs of a culture obviously helps, but for most people is not enough to overcome the feelings of being a stranger.

It should, but apparently it depends on attitude, the type of contact, the setting in which the contact takes place and the reasons which bring the groups together.

Many persons in the armed forces who have lived in foreign countries for several years return to the United States with little understanding or appreciation of the country in which they were stationed. Others, of course, learn the language, make friends, study the culture and continue their interest long after returning home.

A couple of decades ago many people believed that if blacks and whites were to go to the same schools prejudice would be reduced. In many cases that happened, but in many other cases prolonged contact increased misunderstanding. Violence is much more likely in high schools with a balance among two or three ethnic or racial groups. Studies of residents of racially mixed apartment houses found that prejudice increased with contact.

11. Suppose one were assigned the responsibility of preparing people to go to another culture or work with members of a subculture. What would be the specific objectives of such a program and how would they recommend that it be accomplished?

12. Ask participants to complete the sentence "In experiencing Bafá Bafá, I learned . . . . . .

Conclusions

All of the discussion questions are intended to help the participants understand the ways in which people who belong to different cultures, organizations or groups can learn about one another. Some of the conclusions which the participants are likely to reach as they discuss and analyze these questions are:

1. What seems logical, sensible, important and reasonable to a person in one culture may seem irrational, stupid and unimportant to an outsider.

2. Feelings of apprehension, loneliness, lack of confidence are common when visiting another culture.

3. When people talk about other cultures, they tend to describe the differences and not the similarities.

4. Difference between cultures are generally seen as threatening and described in negative terms.

5. Personal observations and reports of other cultures should be regarded with a great deal of skepticism.

6. One should make up one's own mind about another culture and not rely on the reports and experience of others.

7. It requires experience as well as study to understand the many subtleties of another culture.

8. Understanding another culture is a continuous and not a discrete process.

9. Stereotyping is probably inevitable in the absence of frequent contact or study.

10. The feelings which people have for their own language are often not evident until they encounter another language.

11. People often feel their own language is far superior to other language.

12. It is probably necessary to know the language of a foreign culture to understand the culture in any depth.

Bafá Bafá may be purchased from: SIMILE II, P.O. BOX 910, DEL MAR, CA 92014, (619) 755-0272.